

The Intruder

BY GEORGIA WOOD PANGBORN

IF one may credit a certain book of old tales, there once sat by a pool a haggard company of "impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water; for an angel went down at a certain season."

In modern and unpicturesque clothing and cleanliness, without, perhaps, so much hope as those of Bethesda had, but in many ways resembling them, we sat on the Sanitarium veranda in the slanting October sunlight which the sweeping blue shadow of the house at our back was narrowing to a smaller and yet smaller yellow triangle, so that, as we pursued the sun, we crowded together exactly as the dead leaves crowded into fence corners, until at last a chilly little breeze fell upon us and, like dead leaves, dispersed us, leaving, out of a dozen or so, only myself, mummified in a shawl and reading an arid book, in which it was stated that if men have souls at all they are of adventitious growth, like pearls in oysters, and, like pearls, have origin in disease, injuries, or accidental circumstance. Such a sentiment agreed well enough with the bleakness of the place and my desolate companions, whom, had I chosen to look through the long window behind me, I could now have seen crouched beside the lukewarm radiators of the "parlor" with their fancy-work, their gossip, and a parchesi-board. It agreed also with that down-driving multitude of colored leaves, falling with the steadiness of snowflakes, to disintegrate, but little more slowly than snowflakes, in their sodden return to the composition of the soil. I told myself that we were of their number—"All flesh is grass,"—and was indifferent to souls, whether adventitious or not.

The triangle of sun contracted until it only touched my shoulders, the blue shadow having caught me about the feet, risen to my knees, and by little and little enveloped my waist and chest, like that

shroud which the fortune-teller saw rising around King Charles. I was on the point of closing my book and retreating with the rest of them, when Miss Einar came out and began to walk back and forth, her eyes in the ends of the earth.

It was only her second day with us. I had marked her fastidious shrinking from our withered companionship, but had not resented it; the pity would have been if she had found herself at home with us. She was too young and too lovely; or would have been lovely but for her pallor and the angry but impersonal stare of her gray eyes—a stare focussed upon something quite beyond the sordid details of the Sanitarium. The light of her hair, however, could not be tamed even by that cold shadow, and her troubled pacing had youth in it, and grace.

"Oughtn't you to have a wrap, my dear?" I ventured, noting that her arms were visible within their thin sleeves.

She frowningly recalled her thoughts out of vague distances.

"Beg pardon? No, thank you. I am not sensitive to cold."

She resumed her walk. Fifteen paces—wheel—fifteen paces—wheel—and back. I moved to give her a longer path. Sixteen paces she could make it then, and did, while I covertly transferred my languid attention from my book to her.

Finally, with a look at her watch and an obvious effort at courtesy, she said that she was going to the post-office, and would be glad to do any errand for me in the village. I thanked her, but needed nothing, and she departed, slim, white, and young, down the avenue of autumn trees.

Entered from behind me Mrs. Trabb, shivering within the close folds of her lavender shawl, and bringing the atmosphere of some sixty years of evil thinking and doing.

"Did you know," said she, "that she is the worst case here?"

"No."

"The very worst. I had it from the maid on your hall. She told me—"

I rose, murmuring of letters to write. Taetics too frail for Mrs. Trabb. She fenced me into an angle.

"As crazy as a loon; walks the floor all night, talking to herself."

"Insomnia is common enough."

"I know all about *insomnia*. I haven't slept a natural wink for years. Nobody knows what I've suffered. But as for that girl, she's downright insane. I shall complain to the doctor. He has no legal right to have that sort of case here. Your rooms are on the same hall, and your windows open on the same roof as hers. I simply wouldn't dare leave my window open at night the way you do. I knew of a case once—"

But at that I made forcible escape from Mrs. Trabb's squalid repertoire of slime and fury. Having gained my room, I looked about me at my own night-lamp, books, and samovar prepared against the empty giant hours, and felt very sorry for Miss Einar. People who are troubled by sleeplessness, I have sometimes thought, are sorrier than any other brotherhood of invalids for each other.

Sitting by a window commanding the street, I watched for her return, and when I saw her coming, reading, as she walked, a letter of many pages, I set my door ajar that I might speak to her as she passed my room on the way to her own.

"Did you have a pleasant walk?"

"Yes, thank you—" She hesitated, smiling, and thrusting the letter under her belt, unfolded from her handkerchief a small object. This, when it lay revealed in her palm, proved to be an enormous katydid, inert, plethoric, and green as spring-time.

"Poor little chap! He has to die with the summer, but I thought I would give him another twenty-four hours by letting him warm his toes at my radiator. He might sing one more song."

"I'm afraid if he sings in your room to-night he may keep you awake."

At that, with downcast eyes, grave and pale, she closed her fingers over the large insect and left me, shutting the door almost in my face. There had been

a moment's young happiness in her eyes as she stood there with her voluminous letter and the rescued katydid, but it had gone out at a word like an extinguished flame.

While I read in that dolorous book about souls, the night crept forward into the profound darkness of early morning. With evening had come a swift warmth, breeding, out of its meeting with the chill of the day, a thick fog, which laid its blank gray face against the lamp-light of my open window—a face unfeatured except by the ghost of a scantily leaved branch, whose supporting tree trunk was hidden as if beneath deep water.

Within its obscurity the recrudescence katydids clashed incessantly; and although the simple organism of a katydid obviously admits of nothing so subtle as mood, yet, knowing that the death of all that translucent green crowd could be at most but a matter of a few hours, my fancy made out of that harsh death-song the symbol of a certain courage, or at least of a bland indifference to the evident end of summer and life.

In the house the attitude toward these matters was neither courageous nor indifferent, but rather of sullen rebellion. There were other night-lamps than mine, I knew, and here and there in the long, black, airless halls gas-jets were turned down to pin-points, but these illuminations in no way relieved the heavy and despondent blackness, folded in upon itself—folded in again by miles of mist. Upon the sea-floor of such a darkness I was unable to remember the aspect of the stars, or any joy I had ever found in the sun.

I wondered how Miss Einar was faring under these conditions, and turned my ear in the direction of her room. I thought I distinguished a soft regular pacing, and, now and then, though of this I would not be certain, the murmur of her voice.

The clear, chilly sound of cocks sprang up here and there, then ceased, but not without leaving a sense that the corner of darkness had been turned, and that, slowly enough, we were feeling our way toward morning. Somewhat cheered by this assurance, I had almost dozed, when

there was a soft, hesitating movement at my door, followed by a minute rap.

I opened to Miss Einar; the hall behind her was jet black, and her eyes, in the light of the lamp, shone as I have often seen the glowing eyes of moths at my black window-pane. Further likeness to a moth was carried out by a gray shawl which hung from her shoulders like folded gray wings. Like a moth, too, was the subtle shiver and quiver which shook her body and her voice as her lips twitched under their forlorn smile.

"I saw your light. I thought perhaps you were finding it dull, too. My little green man won't sing with the rest. He is dying, I'm afraid." She held the creature pitifully in her hand, and, upon entering, laid it in the circle of light under my reading-lamp. "I hate to see things die," said she.

I hospitably indicated my light house-keeping arrangements and said: "Won't you have some chocolate? I was about to make some for myself."

She shook her head. "I've just had some coffee."

"But coffee keeps you awake!"

"I know."

I took her hands; they were lumps of ice.

"I saw your light, and thought perhaps you wouldn't mind my sitting in here. I don't want to sleep."

If Mrs. Trabb was right (and such people are often right in their diabolical way), still, I had no mind to avoid this distracted young creature, who suddenly fell on her knees before me and began to cry, with her face in my lap. I called her "Poor child," and stroked her hair, exhorting, "There, there!" after the manner of consolers.

"Oh," she said, brokenly, "I'm not crazy yet, but I suppose I shall be soon. I noticed you when I first came, and thought it might help if I could tell you about it. I know you're sick, and I oughtn't to bother you, but other people's troubles *can't* be so bad as mine."

I had just been wondering what wretchedness could be like my own, and now smiled grimly at her naïve selfishness; then on second thought recognized in my attitude the custom of the place, and was ashamed.

"It is better to share such troubles," I said, "when one can."

At this she looked up with sudden directness, and her face showed fear enough, and anger, and bewilderment, but not, I thought, madness. An alienist would make little enough of my opinion, but, given for what it is worth, I thought her sane then, and did not change my mind through all the astonishment that followed.

Ignoring any necessity for preface, she plunged into the middle of things:

"If I had really been on the other side of death, I should certainly have met my father there, and he would never have let things happen as they did; but the really dead must be beyond all that confusion, just as the really asleep are, and the danger is only along the edges. And you know, if there are dangerous things, there is no reason why there shouldn't be others, too, that would like to help; but there are laws that keep them back, the good as well as the bad. But I've often taken mice out of traps or away from cats that were playing with them, and so I know that if the kind ones were sorry enough—as sorry as I am when I see little things in trouble—all the laws in or out of the world could never keep them from interfering sometimes....

"You know that kind of dream in which something terrible is going to happen, and you can't move or cry out, though you try very hard?... They told me it came from overstudy. I had an entrance condition in Greek to make up. One day while I was studying I fell asleep, but I could still see the room—that is, all of it that was in front of my eyes at the last moment when I was awake, for I couldn't turn them right or left. The line of Homer was clear, but everything else was blurred and out of focus, though I could make out the pattern of the wall-paper, Harvey's photograph, my tennis-racquet. I couldn't turn my eyes or lift a finger, and some person or thing stood behind me—so near that if it had breathed it would have stirred my hair. But those things don't breathe, I suppose.

"I tried—horribly—to move, and at last it began to whisper—and this was very strange: it was as if the voice was inside my brain,—such a soft, fine little thread of sound, not really sound at all. But it meant everything that one wants

least to think or hear about—or *ought* not to want to hear about. Cruelties, and hatreds, and selfishnesses—everything that people like you and Harvey and—I had supposed—myself were done with long ages back in the jungle. But as it kept on whispering I began to want to hear more plainly instead of being afraid of it. I began to want—I don't know what—something savage.

"And then it touched me—no more than a finger-tip on my forehead. Even at that I could not stir—at first; but as the finger stayed there, I seemed to have a new idea, for I stopped being afraid; there was no threat, rather there was a promise of something, until at last—I moved—but not in my body. I lifted my right hand and held it before my eyes—and—I couldn't see it, but my real hand lay as quiet as a glove, its fingers between the leaves of my Greek lexicon. All the feeling and power of it had gone out into the other—the one I couldn't see. This hand of air felt strong, yet I couldn't grasp anything with it. When I touched a fold of my dress, I knew that I touched it only as air might know when it blows over something solid—no more than that. . . .

"Then one of the girls that were on the glee club began to sing in her room, and I woke—furious at waking, and only thinking how I could fall asleep again and get altogether out of my body in the way I had begun. Yet, as I woke more fully and remembered the wickedness of whatever it was that had helped me, I was afraid—but not as afraid as I should have been—I was afraid of not being afraid.

"It came often after that. I would fall asleep, and hear the whisper, and raise my hand. Then it would stop as though it saw the hand, though I couldn't; and was watching—as a cat watches for a mouse to come out of its hole.

"And at last I came out. . . .

"The girls were all gone to dramatics that night, and I stayed at home to cram, but I felt so dull that studying was no use, so I lowered the gas to a point and lay down for a while, not meaning to sleep, only to rest, and then go on again. It was early spring, and the snow was melting under a rain-storm. I was watching the rain-drops on the glass, and the re-

flection there of the room and the little yellow point of gas. I had no idea I was asleep, until—until a face looked at me through the window.

"It was larger than human at first, and vague, like a cloud; then shrank down suddenly, like a lantern-slide getting into focus, until it was only a little larger than an ordinary human head. It looked me squarely in the eyes—its lips moved as if it said some word which I could not hear—and it was gone. . . .

"I rose and tried to turn the gas on full. I could not touch the cock. It went through my fingers as if they were air. I looked around, and there was my body lying on the divan, as unconcerned as you please, eyes half opened and face turned toward the window, a pencil in one hand, and the other on my Greek prose book."

Miss Einar's dilated eyes focussed over my shoulder upon my window, as though she expected the blank face of the fog there to take on monstrous features. At the ceasing of her soft voice, the noise of the katydids broke forth in redoubled energy, and I was aware of the sorrowful drip from the leaves and the roof as though the vaporous giant out there were weeping human tears. Yet the katydids, doomed to die to-morrow and presumably without hope of resurrection, were as cheerful as though the night had been dry and filled with summer moonlight. As the girl's long sombre stare continued, I nervously seized the shade-cord, meaning to shut out whatever gigantic horror might be peering in, but she said:

"No, don't do that. I'm always looking at windows and hoping, but that was the only time I ever saw it. There must be strange laws over there. What reason can there be in not being able to feel, hear, and see a thing at the same time? When you see, you can't either hear or touch, and when you hear and touch you are blind, though not altogether—I'll tell you about that later. . . ."

"You *want* to see this face? Wasn't it horrible?"

"No. But sorry and anxious—strained, too, as if it were struggling against something."

"But you said the whispering Thing was wicked."

"This wasn't the thing that had been

whispering. Don't you remember, when I began, what I said about the things that were sorry and wanted to help?"

"Was it—like a man?"

"You couldn't have said it was a man or a woman. It was like one of those marble faces of allegorical figures; big and splendid like that, but fairly on fire with life. I never saw anything else that gave such an idea of being alive. Since seeing that, everything in the world by comparison seems heavy and torpid. But it went as quickly as it had come, like a blown-out flame, and I was alone in the room, shut out of my own body. No, I wasn't alone, for the whispering thing was there. I couldn't see it or hear it. It seemed to have slunk into a corner, like an ugly dog that is afraid to do anything but glare. I could feel its eyes. . . .

"If you could fall into the ocean without drowning, you would wonder what the sharks and cuttlefish might do. It was something like that.

"It seemed a hundred years that I stood there. I hadn't found that place then where there isn't any time or space. I saw the hands of my watch—the little chatelaine pinned to the gown of—of that empty body of mine, and remembered that the girls would come to my room to bother me, and then, perhaps, I would wake up. If I didn't—

"But when that dreadful little watch had measured off a half-hour, the hall door slammed, and the glee-club girl came up-stairs singing—she had a lovely, outdoors, sunshiny kind of voice—and banged at my door. Some one else said, 'Sh! she's asleep'; then I found myself outside the door with the girls, trying to catch hold of them with my fingers that couldn't touch anything, and begging, 'Oh, please—please wake me; I'm not asleep.' Clare, the glee-club girl, looked through the keyhole and said, 'Well, she oughtn't to sleep all night that way,—all dressed and grabbing her old Greek prose!'

"One of the girls had a red rag-doll with fringes on it—an imp thing that they had been fooling with over at the gymnasium. Clare got a chair and stood up on it so that she could throw the thing through the transom and hit my face with it—and then I was back in my body again. . . .

"How good it was to touch things! I jumped up and turned on the gas *then*! You wouldn't believe how I loved the feeling of the brass in my solid fingers, how I gripped it and shook it. I let the girls in, and we made fudge and told ghost-stories. Ghost-stories!

"At Easter vacation I went home. My Greek condition was made up at last, so I could enjoy myself, and now I made sure the dreams would go. That week Harvey asked me to marry him. I know now that I was wrong to accept him, with a thing like that hanging over me, but I didn't know it then, besides. . . . He had the ring in his pocket when he spoke, and pushed it on my finger before I said either yes or no. That's Harvey's way. You can't argue with him. . . ."

She tugged at a thin chain about her neck, and brought up, as if it had been a scapular, an oval case, which she opened, showing a young man's photograph. Not a feature of the face was beautiful, yet I have never seen one more satisfying. Little as one can judge from a photograph, at least there was no disguising the honest kindness of the big mouth and small sharp eyes, nor the obstinacy of the jaw, nor the height and breadth of the head above the ears. In Miss Einar's eyes I read that this was her standard and type of all that was handsomest and noblest in young men. She slipped it from the catch of the chain and stood it up against my books, so that the lamplight fell upon it clearly, and during the rest of her story her eyes rested upon it.

"Afterward, when he found what trouble I was in, and I begged him to let me go, and when his people heard—I don't know how—that I was insane, and threatened to cut him off altogether if he didn't give me up, he just smiled politely, as if some one had told him that it might rain to-morrow. He seemed to be deaf when they or I tried to argue with him—or at least the only way he showed that he heard what his father said was to stop his postgraduate work and try to get a salaried position.

"The night after he had pushed that ring on my finger I was almost too happy to sleep, but finally dozed off, with the diamond pressed under my cheek—such a sharp, determined little thing as a

diamond is! I had the wedding all planned and our house furnished by the time I slept.

"When I woke it was raining, so I went to shut the window; but try as I would my hands would not grasp the sash. I felt drowsy and stupid, as one does when waked suddenly, and kept fumbling and fumbling and wondering what was the matter. It was very dark. The square of open window through which the rain came was hardly lighter than the rest of the room.

"And something was calling me out there. Not that I heard it; it was as if I were pulled by a wire. . . .

"As I went out of the window I could feel the rain driving through me, and the little bare twigs with their swollen buds struck through me—and I was nothing at all, you know, and yet as much as I am now—as much, and more. Then this bit of air that was myself was drawn into a whirlwind. There was a shock, and I was snatched at from this side and that, and shaken and driven here and there. I was the centre of some strange struggle. . . ."

She stopped, and her face lit with sombre ecstasy.

"Then it all stopped, for something kind and gentle had me. I will call it a hand, but it was nothing so human as that. It was like nothing that it is possible to feel in this world. When Harvey kissed me that afternoon I had supposed that nothing in or out of the world could be so lovely as our caring for each other—but this—

"All the happiness that ever was lay in that—hand—or whatever it was. There was no possibility of fatigue in it, or sickness or change. It could have carried me through a thousand years and I should never have grown tired. If I could tell you all that I saw—but there was too much of it, and it was too confused. Centuries went by in a flash, for we were in the place where there is no measure of time.

"One of the wonders was a city that had replaced the old farm next to ours, but not like any city that ever was, for there was nothing sorrowful or dirty or careless anywhere. I can't describe it more definitely than that, for everything was vague like a cloud and jumbled just

like any other dream—but different! So different that it is foolish to call it a dream at all. It is more difficult to describe this part than what came later. What sort of a story do you suppose an Eskimo baby could tell if he were snatched out of his snow hut, taken in a second's time to some elaborate Fifth Avenue dinner, and treated as the guest of honor? He wouldn't know what it was all about. There would be color and light and odors and extraordinary giants so different from his own people that he wouldn't even be sure that he liked them. Probably he would be scared and begin to cry. . . .

"Now, how was it possible, just when I was feeling so safe and happy, that the Whisperer should slip inside the guard of what was protecting me? But there it was—the fine soft quiver inside my ear. . . . And I listened. . . . To think of listening to such things while I was in *that* place! I suppose that was the way the snake's voice sounded in the fairy-story about the Garden. I ought not to have been able to hear it. I know now that I could have helped it; you can, you know. People say that it's impossible to keep from thinking about the things that tempt them. But that isn't so—not entirely.

"And as soon as the Whisperer had gained my attention, the gates of that other place—when I use such words as 'gates' and 'place' you understand, of course, that it is because there are no better words—it was like a gate closing with a thunderclap right in my face; but the Whisperer and I didn't care, for we were back in the jungle where men are not men at all. Everything had tumbled back into great, formless, stupid masses. It was gorgeous, you know—nobody can say that the idea of Lucifer with his bat wings and his flames isn't as artistic as that of Gabriel in feathers and sunshine. . . . Now, instead of all that lovely order and peace there were deserts and mountains and wrecked ships. There were enormous flames, sounds like the deepest notes of an organ, and all sorts of flashing confusion; grinning faces that seemed funny at first, and then changed into unspeakable wickedness, so that I became frightened at last, and broke away from them, dived down into the sea, and ran

through it and under the land, through sand and rocks and graves and buried rivers, then up into the world, and through long rows of city houses. . . .

"There would be a wall, a room with people asleep in it; a wall, another room where some one was sick, and so on, like a string of hollow beads. And all the time it wasn't that I was afraid of what was behind me, but afraid of not being afraid of it. I had got away once, and seemed to know that if I let them get me a second time there would be no return to that other place. I did not understand or altogether like that other place, you see, but I didn't want to lose it, either.

"You know how a mouse squeaks when it is mortally frightened. Have you seen, too, a mouse come right toward the cat that's playing with it, apparently doing as it's told—'Come here and be eaten'? I've seen that, and interfered more than once; and remembering how I tried to be good to mice, I squeaked out some sort of mouse prayer to the other Thing—the kind one. And at that I was caught away, fell endlessly, until I woke in my own bed, and the rain was driving in.

"This time I really did shut the window. The first gray of morning was in the sky, and I could make out through the rain the dark blur of that old farmhouse and the streak of woodland behind it. There was no city there now, nor any dream of one, and nothing either good or evil any longer called me, out there in the rain. . . .

"That was nearly six months ago," concluded Miss Einar, her voice sagging wearily. "Every night since then I have been called and . . . have gone. . . . every night they have fought for me—every night I have broken away and have run through all the world. . . . I have seen every wretchedness there is, everything that is worst among men, but without being able to feel pity or disgust, for all that I saw was a part of myself; and that part of myself, and of the race, everything that you and I are supposed to have left behind, is clear and full of color, but that part which lies above it and which I am fast losing forever is cloudy and veiled; only an outline shows through, here and there, that looks as

if there might be something there not altogether unsubstantial, some sort of solid Walhalla in the sunset, and I try to remember my one glimpse of it, and with that memory to ward off—the rest. . .

"But my power to escape is growing less. Some night I shall go and not come back. . . . The kind spirit has done its best. Of all the little creatures I have tried to save from cruel deaths, not one ever lived. They have always stupidly died in my hands, so that I might as well have let the cat have them in the first place. And perhaps it's like that when we once fall into the hands of those others—the good ones can't help, no matter how hard they try."

Abruptly her head drooped. She sighed, relaxed, and slept. A cold wind blowing through the fog fluttered the flame of my lamp. I drew my shawl about my shoulders, and about the girl also and held her closely. Her hand lay limply in mine, but by degrees it lost the little warmth it had. Then I could no longer hear her breathing. She was dead or flying through space, with all wickedness in pursuit—or I had been, after all, listening to the raving of a clever lunatic.

The oil of my lamp gave out with small cracklings of the wick, and the flame sank to an ill-smelling ring and then to darkness. The fog wavered and rose until the submerged tree took on clear outline; a moment more and the landscape, sponged clear of all obscurity, stood out, sharp and black, the threadbare branches of the trees showing through their network the rolling skyline of the mountains, and behind them the dawn, deliberately increasing, bringing conviction with it of a universe enmeshed and riveted by laws, upon which even so flighty a thing as man can place his faith. Like a Parsee, I watched for the first glimpse of the sun itself, knowing that no ghost, either malevolent or pitiful, could withstand the direct shaft of its sane and honest glory.

Startled out of my contemplation by a slight stir upon the table, I turned my head quickly, half expecting to catch some too palpable shadow in a last attempt at mischief before the sun should have frustrated it, but there was only a fat, oblong object, even in that dim light

showing green, toiling over my papers, treading underfoot with his very perishable green toes the open pages of that melancholy book about souls. Thence he passed to the picture of the young man Harvey, examining it with delicate, waving antennæ. I had a moment's fright that here was more than an insect—until the sun should appear no superstition was too gross for belief,—and I watched him fearfully for a sign. I chose to fancy it a favorable omen that he lingered so long in contemplation of the portrait, and that he creaked out a few rusty, placid bars of his courageous music before it. This he did, and sinking again into lethargy, calmly exhaled his life with the other green things of the year.

As the light grew I held the girl's vacant body very close, expecting every instant the warmth and stir of the returning spirit, but she seemed only to grow heavier and colder, until I fell into a panic lest she had this time lost her way back. I chafed her hands and called her name, but she would have none of me, until, terrified, I freed myself, and leaving her stiffly kneeling, her face upon the empty chair, would have rung the bell for help, but that before I touched it I saw from my window, standing upon the shining wet grass, a young man, who stared up as I stared down, and looked as if he might have thus been staring all night. His hat and coat shone with wetness like the grass, and the early sunlight stretched his shadow toward me like a narrow blue path.

He was a short, square young man, giving an impression of great strength and of health—very steady and quiet in his glance—something of the type one imagines to have been that Du Guesclin who once rescued a lady of dreams called Tiphaigne, and was loved by her forever.

I leaned out and softly called, "Are you Harvey?"

He made no other answer than to whip up the steps on to the veranda. In a moment he was in the room. Quite disregarding me, he seated himself in the chair where I had sat so long and wearily, and took command of those cold stiff hands and the obstinately drooping face.

"If—she is dead—" I quavered.

"Then she'll have to get alive again,"

he answered, quietly. "I'm going to marry her to-day. I came up on the midnight train, and put in the time watching this window. I thought it was as likely the right one as any other. . . . Wake up, Alice—"

Rubbing her hands and listening to her heart, his face grew fighting grim, yet his little gray eyes lost none of their gentleness.

He folded her inside that fog-wet coat of his, and talked steadily into her cold ear, now bullying, now encouraging, but never for a moment dropping into lamentation or entreaty.

"Hurry, Alice. 'Tisn't fair to keep me waiting like this. We've got to be married so as to take the twelve-o'clock train. I've done what I promised—we're independent of everybody; our rooms are all ready for you to walk right into them. Come, come! Why, what nonsense is this!" And so on, and so on, until, making sure that she would never hear him, I wept aloud.

He held up a commanding finger, and I was silent. He had stopped his exhortations, and his face was lined like that of a man who struggles physically; it grew gray and cold, until I half thought that he had died too, in his attempt to reach her.

The sun streamed in more and more, the watery pink light changing to full, strong yellow. It struck straight across my melancholy room and wrapped the mysterious lovers in warm gold, till they locked, to my blurred and weary eyes, something not altogether of earth.

And then there was a deep, long sigh. The girl moved, like one about to wake. I started forward.

"Got her!" cried the boy, jubilantly.

The warm color had come back to her face; her eyes partly opened, but were drowsily fixed upon the sun; her lips moved with some word we could not hear, then smiled peacefully.

Suddenly, with a great shock, she saw whose face it was that bent over her, and sprang away with a laughing cry, only to be caught back to him again.

And so those two radiant figures stood there in the sun, and I, gray and old in the shadow, beheld at last what the love of man and woman may mean and how it makes them as gods.